

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Septuagesima Sunday, February 5, 2023

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 227, 409:1, 335, 411:1-4, 45:1-2.

Lessons: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, 1 Corinthians 14:1-20, Luke 5:1-11.

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 14:1-3.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltretter

NOTE: When Scripture in the New Testament writes about “tongues”, the reference is to foreign languages which others may not understand. This is the kind of thing that happened on Pentecost

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The Apostle Paul has spent several chapters talking about the Christian church on earth. Here he is not talking about the Holy Christian Church, the invisible gathering of all believers, but about the visible church.

Two chapters earlier, he began chapter 12 with the words **“Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.”** 1 Corinthians 12:1 (NIV) He wrote about the different kinds of gifts God gave to the church on earth. He then used the analogy of the human body with its parts to talk about Christ’s church on earth and how each part works together. Then he wrote **“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ... There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.”** 1 Corinthians 12:7, 4, 5 (NIV) He ended that chapter with the words **“But eagerly desire the greater gifts.”** 1 Corinthians 12:31 (NIV)

Every one of you is called to be a child of God, and as a child of God you have been given special gifts to serve God and your fellow Christians. The Word of God tells us **“To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.”** 1 Corinthians 12:8-11 (NIV) Paul elaborated on those gifts: **“in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?”** 1 Corinthians 12:28-30 (NIV)

We might paraphrase his questions: Are all preachers? Are all Bible teachers? Are all writers of Christian encouragement? Are all Christian mothers teaching their children? Are all Christian fathers teaching the catechism as Luther wrote “as the head of the family should teach it in the simplest way to those in his household”?

Then he takes a chapter to show **“the most excellent way”**: love. Although chapter 13, “the love chapter” is popular as a wedding text, its real importance is much greater than romantic love.

This all leads up to our sermon text. Today we see how important it is to

BUILD UP THE CHURCH, BUILD UP THE FAITH OF BELIEVERS

1. “Prophecy”, that is, proclaiming the Word of God, is essential to build up the church.
2. This strengthens, encourages, and comforts believers.

“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.” 1 Corinthians 14:1 (NIV)

Our epistle lesson talked about ‘speaking in tongues’. That gift from the Holy Ghost was especially obvious on Pentecost. On that day, “***there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.***” Acts 2:5 (NIV) Fifteen geographical regions are named on Pentecost. Then the believers in Jesus Christ “***were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.***” Acts 2:4 (NIV)

They were not just babbling, but telling about Jesus Christ in foreign languages, languages that the people from these other nations knew. Now because many of the hearers were Jews, they knew Hebrew or Aramaic, which was the common dialect of spoken Hebrew. But hearing something in the language of the land you are living in is a good way to then be able to tell others – Gentiles, non-Jews – the things they had heard about Jesus when they were in Jerusalem before they returned home.

So Paul says “***For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.***” 1 Corinthians 14:2-3 (NIV)

When he uses the word “prophesy”, that is a word which means “speaking”, “speaking out”, telling about”, “proclaiming”. In the New Testament it has the special significance of speaking about Jesus and what he has done, of proclaiming the Gospel. And the child of God is “***not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.***” Romans 1:16 (NIV)

And what is it that Paul wants to proclaim and wants every Christian to proclaim? The message about Jesus Christ and what he has done to redeem mankind from sin, from the punishment of hell, from the power of Satan.

Speaking in foreign languages had its place in the church, especially as believers went into other nations. But more important was the idea that “***everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.***” Paul is talking about the importance of building up the church, strengthening fellow believers, encouraging and giving comfort from the Gospel to them.

Which of us doesn’t appreciate words from a fellow Christian which encourage us, brighten our day, cheer us up and remind us – or teach us – of some truth of God’s word? When someone sends us a card or a letter or an email or a text message, we even appreciate the graphics and pictures that we see with scripture passages.

Listen to what Paul writes elsewhere in the New Testament about strengthening, encouraging, and building up believers.

He begins his letter to Titus this way: “***Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to build up the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.***” Titus 1:1 (HCSB)

He tells the Thessalonians “***Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.***” 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NASB)

He writes to the Ephesians “***It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.***” Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)

He ends his second letter to the Corinthians with “***Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.***” 2 Corinthians 13:11 (NIV2011)

Scripture stresses the importance of building up one another, of not tearing down or destroying one another. We read in Galatians: “***If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.***” Galatians 5:15 (NIV)

Of course, we must all admit that there is always my sinful flesh and ears that don’t want to hear God’s Law, especially if it applies to us and our lives and points out my sin. As Christians, we are to say and do things that edify, that build up.

Of course, the Christian must talk about sin and must apply the Law of God where it is needed, where sin pops up or where sin wants to take over. Especially when our Christian brother sins, we must admonish as we read in Matthew 18: ***If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.*** Matthew 18:15 (NIV) But notice that it is your responsibility to admonish sin and not to merely gossip about it or expect someone else to do it. If your Christian brother is sinning, you have a responsibility to admonish him. That is an act of love. In a similar vein, if you have a grudge against your Christian brother or sister, you are to go and be reconciled to him or her.

We cannot merely overlook and ignore sin, for any unrepented sin leads to eternal damnation.

In chapter 12 Paul lists the gifts that God has given to those in the church. He writes about the different gifts God gives to believers to serve him and their fellow men, especially believers: ***Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?*** 1 Corinthians 12:27-30 (NIV)

When he writes ‘first’, ‘second’, and so on, he is not saying that any believer is unimportant in the kingdom of God. Jesus himself first of all called the 12 Apostles, and then prophets and teachers –those he sent out to proclaim and teach the truths of the Gospel.

And through it all, the emphasis is on building up the church, building up believers, edifying them. ***But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.*** 1 Corinthians 14:3 (NIV)

And he repeats that idea after talking about speaking in tongues: ***So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.*** 1 Corinthians 14:12 (NIV)

So how can we do that?

For example, we sing after the sermon ***Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.*** Psalm 51:10-12 (KJV)

And where does that “joy of my salvation” come from?

It has to come from God. And shouldn’t it also come through fellow believers, as they strengthen, encourage, edify and comfort us from the Words of God? What have you said or done recently to build up fellow believers and to restore to them the joy of their salvation?

We know that Satan and all the temptations and tempters he has put in the world are trying to destroy our faith. They keep chipping away at our faith and trying to take away the joy of our salvation.

But we must turn to God, and seek to excel in gifts that build up the church with his guidance and help through the use of his Word.

The Christian is not living just for himself or herself. The believer is living for God and for his fellow humans, to witness Jesus Christ to them. May we, each day, use prayer, words and actions to build up one another! Amen.